

Since Stonewall:  
How the Factors that Influence Social Support for Homosexuality Have Changed Since 1970  
by  
Jason Haynes

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## Abstract

From the AIDS crisis to the legalization of gay marriage, the past 40-50 years have been a period of monumental change for the social approval of homosexuality in the United States. Current research has assessed the evolution of public opinion and the factors that influence this public opinion of homosexuality, but few have considered how the impact of these demographic and social factors has changed. Using multiple OLS regression of demographic, religion, and political ideology variables on a composite indicator for homosexual social support for 10-year intervals between 1973 and 2016, results indicated that the impacts of demographic variables have decreased over time and that political party ideology and religion have increased in importance. These results indicate that, with the general social acceptance of homosexuality increasing, we must look to specific groups which have made resistance to this change a factor of group belonging.

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## Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the landscape of social opinions regarding homosexuality has certainly changed. From the riots at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, to the federal legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, the de jure rights of homosexual citizens of the United States have expanded greatly, but this rapid change leaves questions to be answered. Of primary concern to rights activists is the issue of public support—the fight for gay rights did not end with the ability to enter into a lawful marriage with a same sex partner, and so it is paramount to consider the social and public opinions for homosexual sex relations in the United States. Not only is it important to understand the level of support throughout the past 40 years, but it is highly useful to understand what the factors are that influence social support for homosexuality. Through this, effective social outreach services and education opportunities can be offered to specific populations which will allow for the further dismantling of harmful institutions which threaten already vulnerable members of our society. But, this research has been done in multitudes. As can be seen below, the effects of demographics and ideologies has been carefully measured for their influence on personal feelings toward homosexuality. Previous research has also used an individual's opinion on the right for same sex partners to marry as the major metric for support for homosexuality, but this article will not use that metric as same-sex marriage has already been legalized and is no longer of key interest. This research does not seek to assess the level of support for homosexuality nationwide, nor does it seek to assess the *factors* that influence that support (though it does so indirectly), but rather this paper seeks to discover how the *impact* of those factors have changed over the last 40 years.

Speaking more specifically, the hypothesis that this paper hinges on is that the impact of certain variables, such as the demographic variables of age, race, sex, etc. on support for homosexuality will become less prominent over time, giving rise to the higher pertinence of social variables which deal more in explicit group belonging to organizations/social circles which

are predicated on their lack of support for homosexuality, such as certain religions and religious sects and conservative political ideologies. As homophobia was previously a culturally endorsed behavior prior to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is hypothesized as well that the predictive power of the models created for this analysis will increase over time as beliefs toward homosexuality become more polar and less generically negative.

Using standard multiple OLS regression, this research indicated moderate support for the two hypotheses mentioned above. Results of the regression analyses in Table 2 show that support for homosexuality indeed is more dependent on religious and political party group identification now than previously, and that demography has become less intrinsically influential toward beliefs in homosexuality, though they also show that the predictive power of these models has not changed over time—indicating support for the first hypothesis, but not for the second. This has important implications for policy makers, legislators, and civil rights activists, as it is possible to identify certain groups in particular as holding greater influence over the public's beliefs toward homosexuality. While results do indicate that the public is rapidly becoming more inclusive and accepting of homosexuality and LGBT people as a whole, the impact of religion and political party is growing, particularly for fundamentalist religious practitioners and the staunchly conservative, who seem to be getting more explicitly and intentionally in opposition of the social change toward approval of homosexuality. Results of the descriptive statistics indicate that, while the nation is not getting more conservative, there are in fact fewer people who are identifying as Christian, and fewer still who identify as fundamentalist—a change which is matched by an increasingly urban and higher-educated population, which may influence the polarization in beliefs toward homosexuality as they pertain to religion and political party identification.

## Background

Worldwide, it appears that the support for homosexuality has increased since 1981.<sup>1</sup> A similar study suggest that these categories have become only more important throughout the last 40 years as homosexuality has moved from being a universally stigmatized identity to one which is largely approved of save for amongst specific populations who may have more “reasons” for opposing homosexuality.<sup>2</sup>

When considering the issue of same-sex relations, a key difference may lie in the gender of the respondent. We know that men and women in society live with different roles and expectations, and that these too have changed in the last 40 years. Research shows that men and women do not differ greatly in their appraisal of homosexual sex relations in the current time period, but that men are slightly less supportive of homosexual sex relations than are women.<sup>3</sup> This difference is fairly consistent in the literature into the past, but some research shows that there is a stronger negative reaction to homosexuality from men. This difference between the genders likely has to do with the conditions of masculinity in society as they dictate how men are allowed to relate to one another, and that homosexuality is a threat to traditional, socially-approved heterosexual masculinity.<sup>4</sup> Women are expected to hold a supportive and caring role in western society, which may further explain the correlation between support for homosexuality and gender.

The effects of race on opinions toward homosexuality are less straightforward than other forms of demographics, as this demographic category has many subcategories of races and ethnicities within it, as well as the issue that is interaction with other variables. Research shows

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Tom W., Jaesok Son, and Jibum Kim. "Public Attitudes Toward Homosexuality And Gay Rights Across Time And Countries." (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Baunach, Dawn Michelle. "Changing Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes In America From 1988 Through 2010." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2012): 364-378.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Swank, Eric, and Lisa Raiz. "Explaining Comfort With Homosexuality Among Social Work Students: The Impact Of Demographic, Contextual, And Attitudinal Factors." *Journal of Social Work Education* 43, no. 2 (2007): 257-280.

that, of all of the groups, African Americans are the least supportive of homosexuality in the United States, but that all races are generally unsupportive of homosexuality.<sup>5</sup> The lack of support from African American citizens specifically is not likely due to actual inherent homophobia in African Americans as a function of their race, but rather, as the research shows, a function of the intersection of low socio-economic status, higher frequency of religious individuals, at times more rurality, and generally lower education, is that African Americans tend to resemble the other demographic profiles that they are more likely to be in relation to other races in the United States.<sup>6</sup> What this means is that, when controlling for the other demographic variables (particularly religion), the effect of race should be less salient as an identity category when determining beliefs toward homosexuality.

Primarily, research shows that age as a factor of influence over beliefs toward homosexuality is relevant in the current decade, but becomes less salient the farther back in time it is observed.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that older U.S. citizens are less likely to support homosexuality than their younger counterparts are, which holds with the previously established theory that homosexuality was universally stigmatized at the beginning of the framework of this study (pre-1990's), and so age wouldn't be as relevant when compared to the current decade, in which older citizens would be the aged young members from the beginning decade and so are likely to have held onto their previously-common ideologies as the younger cohorts are living in a post-homophobic society.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Baunach, Dawn Michelle. "Changing Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes In America From 1988 Through 2010." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2012): 364-378.

<sup>6</sup> Sherkat, Darren E., Kylan Mattias De Vries, and Stacia Creek. "Race, Religion, And Opposition To Same Sex Marriage." *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (2010): 80-98.

<sup>7</sup> Becker, Amy B. "Determinants Of Public Support For Same-Sex Marriage: Generational Cohorts, Social Contact, And Shifting Attitudes." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 24, no. 4 (2012): 524-533.

<sup>8</sup> Baunach, Dawn Michelle. "Changing Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes In America From 1988 Through 2010." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2012): 364-378.

Research repeatedly demonstrates that those who live in rural areas are more likely to hold negative views toward homosexuality than their urban-living counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan areas are demonstrated to hold very high levels of political liberalism and acceptance of minority groups when compared to rural areas. This, like race, is hypothesized to be a secondary relationship when is caused by lower levels of education, higher rates of religion, and lower socioeconomic status when compared to those who can afford to live within cities which overall require a high-paying job, which is likely to require a high education.<sup>10</sup> Cities in specific geographic regions do differ from one-another in their support for homosexuality, with cities in the northeast region being the most supportive of homosexuals, and cities in the south, such as New Orleans and cities in Texas, are less supportive.<sup>11</sup> This relationship likely has remained steady over time, but became more relevant by comparison in recent times.

There has been a demonstrable effect of education on the level of support for homosexuality in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Institutions of higher education have been demonstrated to have a liberalizing effect on the students that attend them, which may be a function of the higher socio-economic status needed to afford attending university. The potential cause of this, particularly in the current decade, is likely due to the implementation of core requirements and cultural competency classes now required at most universities across the United States, but is likely also due to the university experience being more likely to expose students to a more diverse range of ideas and people, some of which are likely identified as homosexuals.<sup>13</sup>

At a baseline level, being religious is shown to be associated with holding negative views toward homosexuality. This trend seems to be found within all major religions, but there are some

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Gaines, N. Susan, and James C. Garand. "Morality, Equality, Or Locality: Analyzing The Determinants Of Support For Same-Sex Marriage." *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2010): 553-567.

<sup>11</sup> Baunach, Dawn Michelle. "Changing Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes In America From 1988 Through 2010." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2012): 364-378.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid



which are more strongly associated with disapproval of homosexuality than others—namely, Catholicism and biblical fundamentalists, as well as sectarian denominations.<sup>14</sup> It is shown that religion functions closely with conservatism, which tracks with the phenomenon observed among the political parties over the last 40 years—one that solidifies the partisan bifurcation of more than economic policies to be more clearly also a difference in social/cultural ideologies, as is explored below. Though this paper does not distinguish the difference between support for civil unions and same-sex marriages, research has shown that, in the early 2000's, religious groups felt more strongly in opposition to civil unions.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, there is a demonstrated positive relation between believing in inerrancy and creationism specifically, as well as there being moderating effects between these beliefs, religious-conservative identity, and religious tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Political party identification and degree of either conservatism or liberalism are shown to have some of the strongest associations with supporting homosexual sex relations of all of the variables explored in most previous research.<sup>17</sup> This difference is less severe at the beginning of the frame of the analysis, as opposition to homosexuality was generally much higher nationwide regardless of political party, and was less of a political issue than a social one. In recent years, however, with the alignment of queer politics with the left-leaning liberal democrats, the conservative republicans have risen in opposition, creating a bifurcation that has been demonstrated easily in the current research regarding public opinions on the social approval of homosexuality.<sup>18</sup> With the general social changes that have happened that mean the norm is approaching approval for homosexual lifestyles, political party, like most of the other categories

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<sup>14</sup> Sherkat, Darren E., Melissa Powell-Williams, Gregory Maddox, and Kylan Mattias De Vries. "Religion, Politics, And Support For Same-Sex Marriage In The United States, 1988–2008." *Social Science Research* 40, no. 1 (2011): 167-180.

<sup>15</sup> Olson, Laura R., Wendy Cadge, and James T. Harrison. "Religion And Public Opinion About Same- Sex Marriage." *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2006): 340-360.

<sup>16</sup> Perry, Samuel L. "Bible Beliefs, Conservative Religious Identity, and Same Sex Marriage Support: Examining Main and Moderating Effects." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 4 (2015): 792-813.

<sup>17</sup> Hicks, Gary R., and Tien-Tsung Lee. "Public Attitudes Toward Gays And Lesbians: Trends And Predictors." *Journal of homosexuality* 51, no. 2 (2006): 57-77.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

already mentioned, is demonstrating higher relevance in the determination of public support for homosexuality.

## Data and Methods

In order to ascertain the changing framework in attitudes toward homosexuality over time, this analysis utilized four composite files from the General Social Survey, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The General Social Survey is a representative study of non-institutionalized adult United States citizens conducted either every year or every other year, and asks questions on behavior, demographics, and attitudes. Multistage cluster sampling is used for these face to face interview studies, and weights are used to control for sampling error. These four files were composite datasets of the data gathered over each of the administrations within the four time periods: 1973-1983, 1984-1994, 1995-2005, and 2006-2016 to allow for observation of change in the effect of key independent variables on the dependent variable of support for homosexuality.

### Dependent Variable – Homosexual Support Scale

For this analysis, the dependent variable chosen is a scale created from the summation of positive responses to each of the four right-based questions asked on the General Social Survey about beliefs towards homosexuality. While there have been more than these four questions asked regarding homosexuality on the General Social Survey, these four are the only questions that have been asked since 1973, and the only that have been asked continuously across administrations, allowing for appropriate tracking and comparison over time. The scale ranges from 0, representing no rights supported, to 4, which represents all rights supported. The four questions used to create the Homosexual Support Scale are:

1. Suppose this admitted homosexual wanted to make a speech in your community.  
Should he be allowed to speak, or not? (SPKHOMO)

2. Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?  
(COLHOMO)
3. If some people in your community suggested that a book [written] in favor of homosexuality should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not? (LIBHOMO)
4. What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex--do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?  
(HOMOSEX)

For the purposes of the Homosexual Support Scale, the first three questions (SPKHOMO, COLHOMO, and LIBHOMO) are all binary and are simple to add to the scale using the positive response. For HOMOSEX, however, the possible responses range on the indicated four point scale above, with two moderate responses. For the purposes of creating the composite indicator of the Homosexual Support Scale, all responses other than “not wrong at all” were coded as negative, and the only response which would add a point to the scale was the response of “not wrong at all.” This is motivated both by logic, in that there should be no reluctance to allow two consenting adults to have sex based upon their sexuality in any case, and methodologically by the distributions seen for each time period holding very few responses in the category of “wrong only sometimes.”

### Independent Variables

Ten sociodemographic variables were selected through a mixed-method iterative process for inclusion as the most key factors that influence support for homosexuality—particularly over the last 40 years. The distributions for the ten sociodemographic independent variables are included in Table 1 in the results section of this paper, and are as follows with the original variable name supplied in all capitals. The majority of the variables selected that are demographic in nature were selected intuitively based on previous research highlighted in the

literature review above, and for their stability across all administrations and ease of understanding. The first of these variables is the age of the respondent (AGE) in continuous format, followed by a binary version of the categorical RACE variable where 1 equals all non-white races, and gender (SEX) also formed as a binary with the reference category being men and the analysis category (or 1) being female. Moving towards less-intrinsic variables, the number of children (CHILDS) was recoded into a binary as well as 1 = has children and 0 = does not have children, as was RES16, measuring whether the respondent was raised in an urban area (0) or a rural area (1). Years of education (EDUC) and political ideology (POLVIEWS) were included as interval level variables as well, with political ideology (POLVIEWS) measured on a scale of 1-7, extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Finally, three religious variables were included as a result of iterative testing which eliminated other collinear variables. These three were: Christian religion vs. all other religions in binary form (RELIG), fundamentalist vs. non-fundamentalist in binary form (FUND), and whether or not the respondent regularly attended religious services, where “regularly” indicates once per month or more, in binary form as well. Fundamentalism was set aside from Christianity as fundamentalism is a sect which holds most closely to scripture, which directly denounces homosexuality as an outright sin.

Using these binary and continuous-level variables, multiple OLS regression was conducted using two models on each of the four time periods in this analysis, accounting for a total of 8 models. The first model in each time period was comprised simply of the demographic variables: age, female sex, non-white race, has children, raised rurally, and years of education. This model was set aside from the second model, which includes the variables for political ideology and religiosity, to assess the relative impact of the demographic variables versus the group identity variables as time changes. This was to allow for the appraisal of the hypothesis that, over time, demographics would become relatively less predictive for beliefs toward homosexuality when compared to political ideology and religious affiliation. Finally, a simple

comparison of coefficients between the first and last time period was constructed to allow for ease of understanding how the impact of these variables may have changed in both direction and strength over time.

## Results

To establish a basis for this analysis on the factors that influence social approval of homosexuality in the United States, it is an important first step to assess how that level of support has changed over time. As figure one shows, the level of support for homosexuality has varied quite strongly in the past 40 years.

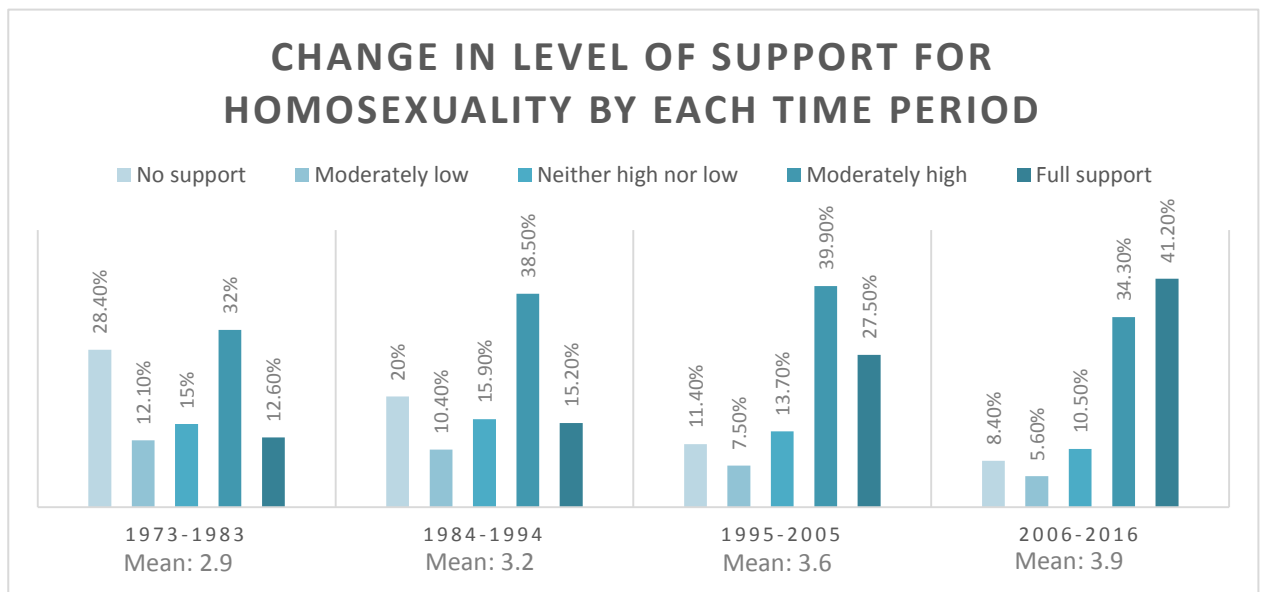


Figure 1: Support for Homosexuality over Time

Overall, in this scale of one (no support) to five (full support) for support for homosexuality, it is possible to see that the proportions of moderately high and highest support have increased as the proportion of responses for the lowest two support categories have decreased. Observing just the mean difference between the four categories, where the population in 1973-1983 rated about 3 out of 5 on the homosexual support scale, the population of 2006-2016 rated at just under 4 out of 5 on the support scale, which is an increase of 20% support over the last 40 years.

It is interesting to note the distribution in each graph as it relates to the high proportion of responses that come in the “moderately” high category. As a reminder, the homosexual support scale in this report originated as a count of 4 key support questions that the General Social Survey asks—essentially, do you think homosexual books should be in libraries, do you think that homosexuals should be allowed to teach children, do you believe homosexuals should be allowed to speak in public, and do you think homosexual sex is ever okay? These four questions were counted using a positive response adding to their counter, meaning that valid responses can run between 0, representing no support for any of these questions, and 4, representing support for all these questions. This scale of 0-4 was recoded to match a more intuitive scale of 1-5, with the upper and lower limits remaining the same. The univariate distributions of the four indicator questions show that the category which is causing the most trepidation and least amount of support from respondents is the question asking if homosexual sex is ever okay. This is likely due to the graphic nature of considering this question, and, though still an excellent indicator for homosexuality, might bely the common trope of laissez-faire support for homosexuality that is predicated on not knowing intimate details. As figure one above shows, the distribution finally shifts to where the modal category is now full support for homosexuality, as opposed to the all-but-one distribution of the first three time periods. As homosexuality has become more normalized, it is likely that the knowledge and acceptance of homosexual sex practices has also increased, reducing the prevalence of this last holdout category.

### Predictor Variable Distribution

Though the regression analyses conducted for this research account for population size for each of the predictor variables included in the analysis, it is important to understand how these populations may have changed over the 40 years that represents this frame of analysis. Table 1 below indicates the percent distributions for each of the variables used independently to later predict the level of support for homosexuality.

**Table I.** Percentage Distribution of Homosexuality Support Scale and Predictor Variables  
Mean Homosexual Support Scale score for each group presented in parentheses

	1973-1983 ( <i>n</i> = 6406 <sup>a</sup> )	1984-1994 ( <i>n</i> = 9667 <sup>a</sup> )	1995-2005 ( <i>n</i> = 5921 <sup>a</sup> )	2006-2016 ( <i>n</i> = 8061 <sup>a</sup> )	Change <sup>b</sup>
Homosexuality Support Scale (mean)	1.9	2.2	2.6	2.9	1
Age (mean)	44.6 (1.94)	45.5 (2.34)	45.7 (2.82)	48.1 (2.99)	3.5 (1.05)
Non-White Race	14 (1.80)	17.2 (1.98)	20.6 (2.48)	25.7 (2.67)	11.7 (0.87)
Female	55.2 (1.88)	57.2 (2.19)	55.7 (2.67)	55.3 (2.99)	0.1 (1.11)
Has Child(ren)	74.4 (1.76)	72.1 (2.05)	71.6 (2.49)	72.8 (2.82)	-1.6 (1.06)
Raised in Rural Area	63.2 (1.61)	59.4 (1.95)	55.4 (2.46)	53.1 (2.76)	-10.1 (1.15)
Years of Education (mean)	11.8 (1.94)	12.7 (2.36)	13.4 (2.69)	13.5 (3.03)	1.7 (1.09)
Political Conservatism (mean)	4 (1.81)	4.1 (2.16)	4.1 (2.61)	4.1 (2.95)	0.1 (1.14)
Christian Religion	89.4 (1.78)	87.8 (2.09)	80.1 (2.52)	76.1 (2.78)	-13.3 (1)
Fundamentalist	30.1 (1.38)	34.7 (1.70)	31.2 (2.13)	27.2 (2.34)	-2.9 (0.96)
Regularly Attends Religious Services	51.9 (1.6)	51.9 (1.95)	47.2 (2.36)	45.3 (2.60)	-6.6 (1)

<sup>a</sup>Sample sizes based on total valid responses in the full regression models found below.

<sup>b</sup>Change in distribution between first time period (1973-1983) and last time period (2006-2016).

Percentages are based on all valid responses.

Variables on a scale or interval, such as age, years of education, and political conservatism have a mean Homosexual Support Scale score for the average group, following conventional rounding rules

As Table 1 shows, and as has already been stated, the mean level of support for homosexuality has increased since the first time period in observance, expanding from just under 2 to nearly 3—an increase of 20%. In literal terms, this means that in the first time period, the average American citizen supported about two out of the four indicators for homosexual support, while the most recent time period shows that U.S. citizens generally support  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the indicators. The variation of the strict demographic variables, such as age, race, and gender are not entirely interesting, as the differences may in good part be due to sampling and weighting on the part of the administration of the General Social Survey, but barring that consideration, these results indicate that the U.S. population is slowly becoming older, less white, and staying generally stable in terms of gender. It appears that slightly fewer people are having children, but this difference is so small it is nearly negligible, as this is a percent change of just 1.6% in the

negative. One key statistic that *has* changed, however, is the distribution of urbanicity in the U.S. population—it appears that just over 10% *less* of the population grew up in a rural area in the most recent time period compared to the first time period. The mean number of years of education have increased slightly since the first time period as well, by an amount that essentially could encompass a two-year degree.

There has been little change in the political conservatism between the four time periods--the data demonstrates that the mean response is category 4, which is coded as the median/neutral between very liberal(coded as 1) and very conservative(coded as 7). When considering religiosity, it appears that by great magnitude (13.3%) the U.S. population is becoming less Christian when compared to 40 years ago. The percentage of respondents who identify as fundamentalist has similarly decreased in the last 40 years, but to a degree of about one quarter that of Christianity as a whole, and the proportion for frequency of religious attendance (coded as attending church at least once monthly) has similarly decreased by just over 6%.

Table 1 also holds the mean Homosexual Support Scale score for each predictor group used in the regression analysis below. This is done to track the change in the predictor variable population's average support for homosexuality over the four time periods, in an effort to observe the isolated effect of time on support for each group. Those of average age, women, and those of average years of education all had a mean Homosexual Support Scale score that matched or exceeded the overall mean score. Aside from those categories, all others were consistently under the mean Homosexual Support Scale score—those of non-white race, those with children, those raised rurally, those who report being Christian and fundamentalist especially, and those who regularly attend religious services. These results are expected, as reference groups were chosen based on literature which indicated they would hold lower favorability for homosexuality (aside from females which the literature indicated were neutral compared to males).



When considering the rate of change for each of the predictor variables, all of the predictor variables' Homosexual Support Scale scores vary in magnitude of change within 0.2 points of the mean support scale score, indicating similar overall variation. The change for those raised in a rural area and those of the average (moderate) political ideology were the greatest at 1.15 and 1.14 point increases over their original scores, indicating that the impact of living rurally and the impact of being politically moderate are less negative as time goes on. Those who report a non-white race and those who identify as a fundamentalist show the only growth rate lower than the growth rate of the overall average. There were no groups which did not steadily grow in their mean Homosexual Support Scale score, demonstrating that, even for the least-likely groups to support homosexuality, the support for homosexuality is increasing steadily.

With the baseline level of support for homosexuality and the demographic profile of the United States over time established, it is now possible to engage meaningfully in observing the impacts of these predictors on the level of support. Combining these distributions to reveal not just influence, but the *change* in that influence over time. Though the mean support scale scores indicate the individual impact of each predictor variable and its change over time, they are in isolation. To better understand the complex issue including all relevant variables, a regression model has been constructed below.

### Change in Predictor Variable Influence

The key predictor variables detailed above were regressed using simple multiple OLS regression to test their association with and influence over the key variable of interest: the Homosexual Support Scale. Two models were constructed for each time period, the first being simply demographic variables, and the second including variables on political party ideology and religiosity, all demonstrated in Table II.  $R^2$  results for each model indicate that the explanatory powers of the models stayed relatively static over time, which contradicts the hypothesis that these relationships would be less relevant and strong in the earlier time periods. In fact, with an

R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.288, Model 2 of the first time period exceeded the explanatory power of the R<sup>2</sup> value in the most recent time period. Essentially, in defiance of the hypothesis that associations would strengthen over time, about 25-29% of the variance in support for homosexuality can be explained by the full models, and this does not change drastically over time.

**Table 2. Multiple Regression Coefficients for Homosexual Support Scale**

	1973-1983 (n = 6406 <sup>a</sup> )		1984-1994 (n = 9667 <sup>a</sup> )		1995-2005 (n = 5921 <sup>a</sup> )		2006-2016 (n = 8061 <sup>a</sup> )	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-0.017**	-0.016**	-0.012**	-0.01**	-0.012**	-0.013**	-0.014**	-0.011**
Non-White Race <sup>b</sup>	-0.026	0.131**	-0.186**	-0.038	-0.244**	-0.122**	-0.378**	-0.287**
Female <sup>b</sup>	0.022	0.097**	0.1**	0.148**	0.136**	0.169**	0.13**	0.162**
Has Child(ren) <sup>b</sup>	-0.094**	-0.008	-0.116**	-0.033	-0.218**	-0.093**	-0.14**	-0.034
Raised in Rural Area <sup>b</sup>	-0.454**	-0.311**	-0.365**	-0.277**	-0.293**	-0.22**	-0.279**	-0.214**
Years of Education	0.138**	0.131**	0.143**	0.135**	0.11**	0.103**	0.108**	0.1**
Political Conservatism		-0.107**		-0.119**		-0.129**		-0.122**
Christian Religion <sup>b</sup>		-0.278**		-0.274**		-0.091*		-0.076*
Fundamentalist <sup>b</sup>		-0.443**		-0.421**		-0.440**		-0.458**
Regular religious attendance <sup>b</sup>		-0.366**		-0.31**		-0.373**		-0.343**
Constant	1.14**	2.20**	1.16**	2.10**	2.08**	2.89**	2.40**	3.10**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.236	0.288	0.207	0.267	0.162	0.255	0.181	0.279

<sup>a</sup>Sample sizes based on total valid responses in the full regression models

<sup>b</sup>Reference categories are white race, male, raised in city/metropolitan area, less than bachelor's degree as highest degree held, non-Christian religion, religious, non-fundamentalist, doesn't regularly attend religious services, has been married, and is currently married, respectively.

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01

The comparison for the R<sup>2</sup> value can be seen along with other comparisons between the first and fourth time periods in Table 3. It is interesting, however, to observe the difference between the R<sup>2</sup> values for the demographic model in the first time period, as it holds the most explanatory power of all of the basic models. This may lend some credence to the idea that beliefs toward homosexuality have become more normative in recent years and the variation now requires ideological differences based on political party and religion, which the full model is meant to demonstrate. Though, because race and gender are not statistically significant in Model 1 of the first time period, that leaves the majority of the explanatory power to age, education, having children, being raised in a rural area, and years of education.

**Table 3.** Difference in Coefficients for Homosexual Support Scale, 1973-1983 vs. 2006-2016

	1973-1983 ( <i>n</i> = 6406 <sup>a</sup> )	2006-2016 ( <i>n</i> = 8061 <sup>a</sup> )	Change
Age	-0.016	-0.011	0.005
Non-White Race <sup>b</sup>	0.131	-0.287	-0.418
Female <sup>b</sup>	0.097	0.162	0.065
Has Child(ren) <sup>b</sup>	-0.008	-0.034	-0.026
Raised in Rural Area <sup>b</sup>	-0.311	-0.214	0.097
Years of Education	0.131	0.1	-0.031
Political Conservatism	-0.107	-0.122	-0.015
Christian Religion <sup>b</sup>	-0.278	-0.076	0.202
Fundamentalist <sup>b</sup>	-0.443	-0.458	-0.015
Regular religious attendance <sup>b</sup>	-0.366	-0.343	0.023
Constant	2.20	3.10	0.9
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.288	0.279	-0.009

<sup>b</sup> Reference categories are white race, male, raised in city/metropolitan area, less than bachelor's degree as highest degree held, non-Christian religion, religious, non-fundamentalist, doesn't regularly attend religious services, has been married, and is currently married, respectively.

When considering the effect of age on beliefs toward homosexuality, it is possible to see in Table 2 that the impact remains negative, of a similar magnitude, and entirely significant across all time periods and models. As Table 3 further demonstrates, the difference between the first and last time periods in terms of the effect of age show that the difference is negligible at 0.005 in favor of the first time period. Race demonstrates an interesting association, however. In the first time period, the association is either negative and insignificant or positive, but in all other models it is negative, and with the exception of Model 2 of the second time period, is significant. In all models, however, race appears to be mitigated by the inclusion of religion and political party identification. Table 3 demonstrates that the difference is significant and highly negative due to the positive correlation in the first model. As for gender, the association is consistently positive across all models, meaning women in general are more supportive of homosexuality than are men. This association is strengthened across the models with the inclusion of religion and political variables, and Table 3 demonstrates that this association has gotten stronger over time by about 0.06 points. Having children is a relatively unhelpful indicator for support for homosexuality in these models, as it is either a weak indicator (less than 0.1 magnitude),

insignificant, or often both. Growing up in a rural area shows a constantly-significant, constantly-negative impact on support toward homosexuality. The magnitude of impact of growing up rurally decreases consistently across the four time periods from -0.311 to -0.214, a difference of nearly 0.1. Education is similarly consistent across all models, though it is consistently positive in its impact. In comparison with many of the other variables which are binary, this variable has high magnitude, and is likely the best predictor at anywhere between an addition of 0.143-0.1 per year of education. As Table 3 shows, the impact of education decreases lightly over the years of analysis.

For the non-demographic variables of religion and political ideology, the results are consistent in their significance to the model, but have some interesting differences in magnitude. Being Christian significantly decreases support for homosexuality, but in the latter two time periods the magnitude of this association becomes nearly negligible, reducing in magnitude by about 0.2 between the first and last time periods. Being fundamentalist is consistent in its strong negative association with high magnitude, and does not dip below -0.421 across any of the models—with the most recent time period holding the highest magnitude coefficient. Similarly, attending religious services at least once a month had a consistent and strong negative effect on support for homosexuality, ranging from -0.366 in the first time period, to -0.343 in the most recent, with no steady trending increase or decrease across the four periods.

## Conclusion

The research in this paper revealed divergent support for the two hypotheses originally presented, amongst other interesting results. First, the primary hypothesis that the associations between the sociodemographic variables and support for homosexuality would increase greatly in strength over time was disproven by the relatively stable  $R^2$  value of the full models across all four time periods. Though this does demonstrate that the models are good predictors of beliefs toward homosexuality, it also shows that the theory that the general social disapproval of

homosexuality would make individual factors insignificant in the past is perhaps unfounded. It seems that, despite people in general being less supportive of homosexuality the farther back in our time periods we go, the same trends of greater/lower levels of support between groups still exist.

As for the second hypothesis that political and religious factors would increase in importance over time, this hypothesis seems to be supported by this research. The  $R^2$  and significance levels for the full models, which include these variables, increased in differential magnitude over time between themselves and the smaller demographic models. This may indicate that, as time goes on, groups which make exclusion and disapproval of homosexuals a tacit part of the group ideology will continue to do so and become a greater predictor for those who may also refuse to support the rights of homosexuals.

There are broad-reaching implications for these findings. They imply that, with the relatively recent greater social approval of homosexuality, support has become a polar issue for key groups, particularly pertaining to political party and religion. While society at large moves toward broad social approval for homosexuality, there appear to be growing mainstays of homophobia in the fundamentalist religious communities and in the ever-polarizing realm of political party identification. As political ideology continues to be an issue of opposition, social issues such as gay marriage and homosexuality generally have become more of an issue of political party than they previously had, and may continue to move in that direction. With this polarization of beliefs toward homosexuality based on political party, and the religion which often informs political ideology, it is reasonable to have fear that, with a changing political climate, rights which have been previously established such as the right for homosexuals to marry, could be rescinded. As laws are mutable, and the supreme court has recently had two liberal-leaning justice seats become available under a republican administration, the political ties

to approval of homosexuality are of key importance—as they could soon determine the de jure status of homosexuality.

This research has some limitations. Primarily, there are likely many more variables which could more accurately predict beliefs toward homosexuality and be tracked over time. This limitation is imposed both by the threat of multi-collinearity if too many variables were to be included and by the availability of variables over the entire course of the time period in this analysis as the GSS has not consistently asked the same questions over each administration, which makes tracking correlations over time nearly impossible. Additionally, Table 3 includes the basic difference between the coefficients of the factors in this analysis, but does not include significance testing. This was primarily a limitation on the structure of the datasets, as rather than one large dataset with time period indicators, it was necessary due to size to split them into four separate datasets. This made a test of significant difference impractical, but it would lend more credence to the interpretation of the differences. Finally, the time periods established present a small limitation for analysis. When considering how rapidly the issue of social approval for homosexuality has changed in the last 40 or so years, 10 year intervals, particularly for the most recent 10 years, may not be as granular as would be ideal for such an analysis.

Future research on this topic should examine the data at a more granular level, and implement event-based research into the design of their analysis rather than a blocked interval-style time period system. Doing this would allow for further analysis into the impact of key events such as the legalization of gay marriage or the murder of Matthew Shepard, which could reveal a more phenomenological association between support and other factors. Additionally, next steps for this research could move beyond the models constructed to include attitudinal constructs based on individual questions, such as constructs for sexual liberalism, belief in civil rights, and support for the disenfranchised.

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## Curriculum Vita

Jason Haynes was born on April 10, 1994 in the town of Rumford, Maine. At 24 years old, Jason is the holder of a Bachelor of the Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Vermont, and is a current degree candidate for a Master of Science degree in Government Analytics from Johns Hopkins University. Jason has completed advanced research in both undergraduate and graduate coursework on the topics of women's rights, sexual violence, prison parenthood, LGBTQ rights, and is currently working with a government contractor implanted within the Department of Defense conducting research and preparing informational products on military members, their spouses, and their children regarding health and wellbeing, access to resources, and happiness with the military way of life. Jason continues to seek opportunities to use his skills as a researcher to improve the lives of others and to add important, rigorously-maintained, methodologically-sound information to the field of scholarship.